An important factor in the tribal system of the Masai is the presence of medicine-men whose duties are in general connected with the divination of future events, with the administration of drug, and with the practice of witchcraft. There appear to be three grades of medicine-men, whose spheres of influence are divided into these three categories, but, for practical purposes, it is only necessary to consider the position of the first grade, represented by the person of the Laibon, or "Ol-oiboni," who is the Chief Medicine-Man of the tribe. The history of the Laibons is recorded in Mr. Hollis' book on the Masai, pp. 224-230, and it is unnecessary to enter into it here, but it may be mentioned that Mbatian, who died about 1890, and Lenana, his son and successor, acquired such great influence over all sections of the Masai that the position of Laibon came to be regarded by certain of the European officers who had not carefully investigated the facts of the case, as synonymous with that of a paramount chief. It does not appear, however, that the Laibons have ever attempted to assume a position resembling that of kings of native tribes, and the appointment by Government of Lenana, and, at his death, of his son Seggi, to the office of Paramount Chief of the Masai was, in fact, the result of a misunderstanding of the normal state of affairs which steps have now been taken to rectify.

The medicine-men

The Laibons

The process displayed by the pastoral Masai "Murran" in raids on surrounding tribes combined with their ceaseless activity in following this pursuit made their name dreaded throughout East Africa and hindered for many years the passage of caravans by the direct route from Uganda to the Coast. When eventually Europeans penetrated the highlands of British East Africa, they found the Masai with their flocks and herds scattered over a wide area. The story of how they were eventually concentrated in one reserve is told in Chapter III., but it is necessary to draw attention here to the effect which this concentration, combined with the introduction of veterinary skill and the cessation of raiding by and against them, had on the Masai. In 1904, before any administrative limit had been placed on the movements of the tribe, it was estimated that the Masai possessed 50,000 head of cattle. In 1911, 60,000 head was said to be in the Northern Reserve alone, and this estimate was subsequently increased to 200,000 when the stocks which were attempting to move south had been more thoroughly examined. 50,000 head of cattle moved south in 1911 but in the final move from Laikipia in 1912 and 1913, nearly 300,000 head was counted. By March 1914, all the Masai herds being located in one reserve, the total estimate for the tribe had leaped up to 600,000 and the number of cattle in the possession of the Masai is now supposed to be in the neighbourhood of three-quarters of a million. These latter figures are the estimates of Mr. R. W. Hemsted, who has been the Officer-in-Charge of the Masai Reserve for more than five years, and, in spite of the objection taken by the Masai on superstitious grounds to the counting of their stock, they must be taken to be substantially accurate. It is scarcely reasonable to suppose that the earlier figures, particularly the first two mentioned, are in any way so exact, but, after allowances have been made for this, it is obvious that an enormous increase in stock has taken place. In addition to this cattle, the Masai are said to possess something over two million sheep and ten thousand donkeys. The stock-carrying capacity of the 14,000 square miles included within the borders of the Masai Reserve, is limited to a certain extent by the aversion shown by the natives to grazing cattle in areas which from past experience they believe to be infected by disease, and, in parts of the Reserve, land which appears to be admirably suited for stock remains unoccupied on this account, no attempt having been made to utilise veterinary skill and treatment in rendering their cattle immune from the disease. With the exception of these areas, the Reserve may fairly be said to be stocked to its fullest capacity, and in Masai, who number all told about 45,000 souls, possess capital in cattle to the amount of rather more than £110 per head. They are thus, in all probability, the richest uncivilised tribe in the world. It is not surprising, therefore, considering their conception of manual labour as degrading, the limitations of their personal requirements and their immense wealth in livestock, to find that they are unwilling to work for wages as do the members of other tribes. Their national diet is meat and milk, both of which they have in plenty, and they can procure any other food or commodity they desire by sale or barter of stock.

The Masai as stockowners.

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SECTION VII

THE MASAI EXTRA PROVINCIAL DISTRICT

GENERAL NOTE

MASAILAND constitutes an Extra Provincial District under an Officer in Charge, holding the powers of a Provincial Commissioner, with two District Commissioners, stationed at Kajiado and Narok. The legislation in force in other parts of the Colony applies to the District, but the Outlying District Ordinance, No. 25 of 1902, has also been applied to it, in order to provide a means for controlling immigration from other tribes, a matter to which, as will be subsequently shown, much importance is attached by Masai tribesmen. The area of the District is 15,177 square miles and the population was estimated in 1945 at 53,000.[1] The density is thus 3·4 per square mile.

The Masai District contains in its more northern section a considerable area of land which ranks for agricultural or pastoral purposes with parts of the neighbouring Highlands reserved for European use, though it is to be noted that the rainfall here is more variable than in the central part of the Highlands. The lower parts of the District have a lower and even more variable rainfall, with the result that there is an area, conservatively estimated at a little over 3,000 square miles, which is arid and for all practical purposes waterless.[2] But the value of the large area held by the Masai is not to be judged by its agricultural possibilities, for if the Masai no longer justify the character assigned to them by history as "a virile tribe of predatory nomads," they have at all events maintained their traditional habit of life as a pastoral people, and though there is some cultivation in the Nairagie-Ngare area and also near Ngong, this forms only an infinitesimal part of the District, and is for the most part carried out by Kikuyu immigrants on behalf of the local Masai.

It is of interest to note that in 1904 the number of cattle was estimated at only 50,000 and the sheep and goats at 600,000. This may have been an underestimate, though it must be realized that the country was still to some extent suffering from the effects of the great rinderpest epidemic of 1890, which had entailed such catastrophic results both on the numbers and the military power of the Masai. By 1914 the estimate had gone up to 600,000 head of cattle and over a million and half sheep and goats.[3] The Masai herds suffered severely in the drought of 1933 and 1934, when their losses of cattle were estimated at over a quarter of a million. But a recent estimate has put the number of cattle at over 700,000, with 800,000 sheep and a large number of donkeys. The further increase in the number of cattle is to some extent affected by the existence of fly, which is prevalent on the South Kavirondo boundary, in the extreme west, and also in the middle area, where the Kajiado and Narok Districts join. But if the present estimate of the stock is correct,

[1] Kenya Colony Blue Book, 1946, page 150.

[2] There is a summary of the physical conditions of the district by L. Jones at page 49 of Africa, January, 1939, together with a useful bibliography.

[3] Administrative and Political History of the Masai Reserve, G. R. Sandford, 1918, page 3.

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the Masai must, considering their small numbers, have a larger potential capital per head than any other tribe in East or Central Africa.

Practically the whole population may be said to belong to the Masai tribe, though there are a small number of immigrants, numbering rather less than one thousand in all, ninety per cent. being Kikuyu. As shown above, they are for the most part employed by the Masai in the cultivation of the small area of land used for agricultural purposes. There has been a certain amount of intermarriage, but the penetration of the country by the Kikuyu is viewed with distrust by the Masai, and three Alien Committees have lately been established in order to consider measures for the control of alien immigration. An area of 47 square miles (known locally as Oberguruone) within the Masai Native Land Unit was set aside in 1940 for "squatters" displaced from European farms, most of whom are Kikuyu.[1] But this area will remain politically separate, and it will not affect the position of the Masai as a homogeneous population.

Early records refer to the existence in Masailand of a number of Dorobo, of whom Masai tradition speaks as the original inhabitants of the country. When Europeans first came into contact with the Masai, part of the Dorobo were still leading a primitive life in the bush, while part served the Masai as herdsmen and in some cases had small herds of their own. These people have, however, now been absorbed by the Masai and are not readily distinguishable from them.

THE MASAI TRIBE

Reference will be found in the Chapter on Tanganyika to the circumstances in which the Masai tribe, as it existed in 1890, was cut in two by the international boundary drawn between Kenya and Tanganyika.[2] The area thus left to the Masai in Kenya, now estimated at 15,177 square miles, compares with the area of 18,470 square miles now held by the Tanganyika Masai, with an estimated population of 50,168, and a density of 1.7 per square mile. The proceedings as the result of which the Kenya Masai were in 1911 placed in occupation of their present area have had a prominent place in the controversies connected with the alienation of native lands in the Colony, but it will be sufficient to refer here to the facts as summarised in paragraphs 633 to 674 of the Report of the Land Commission of 1933.[3] The Masai lands are now held as a Native Land Unit under the terms of the Native Lands Trust Ordinance 28 of 1938 and the Kenya (Native Areas) Order in Council 1939. There is, however, one fact which differentiates the Masai lands from those occupied by other tribes under the terms of this legislation, or those held by the Tanganyika Masai. Whatever the judicial value of the Agreements made with the Kenya Masai in 1904 and 1911, it is held, in the words used by the Governor of Kenya in 1948, that they "have the validity of a Treaty."[4] If so, the terms of the Order confirming the Agreement of 1911 constitute a moral obligation to the Government to reserve those lands for the exclusive use of the Masai, "so long

[1] Report on Native Affairs 1939-45, page 14. But see also the Agrarian Problem in Kenya, 1948, page 19 for more recent developments. Most of the Kikuyu are said to have abandoned their lands in the Settlement.

[2] Chapter XIV, page 280.

[3] Cmd. 4556 (1934), page 184. For fuller details see Chapter III of Administration and Political History of the Masai Reserve, previously referred to.

[4] Despatch No. 92 dated 17 April, 1948. The Agreement of 1911 is printed on page 377 of the Report of the Land Commission previously referred to.